

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 00463 131908Z

64

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

CINCPAC

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL MUNICH

USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USDEL MBFR VIENNA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 0463

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CH, UR

SUBJ: SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS: HELICOPTER CREW, CHOUS DEATH

1. SUMMARY. A SOVIET MFA OFFICIAL SAID THAT THE CHINESE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 00463 131908Z

STATEMENT ON THE RELEASE OF THE HELICOPTER CREW SHOWED

THE CORRECTNESS OF THE SOVIET LINE BOTH ON THAT INCIDENT AND IN GENERAL. HE SAID THAT THE SOVIETS WERE "DELIGHTED" AT THE RELEASE, BUT WERE STILL WAITING TO SEE WHETHER PEKING WAS GENUINELY INTERESTED IN IMPROVING INTER-STATE RELATIONS. THE CONTINUING ANTI-SOVIET PROPAGANDA WAS NOT A GOOD SIGN, HE SAID, AND REITERATED THAT IMPROVED RELATIONS WERE UP TO PEKING. HE SAID THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD HANDLE THE PROTOCOL FORMALITIES FOR CHOU EN-LAI'S DEATH THE SAME AS THEY HAD FOR TUNG PI-WU'S DEATH LAST APRIL. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFF CALLED ON VIKTOR KRASHENINNIKOV, COUNSELOR OF THE MFA'S FIRST FAR EAST DIVISION, ON JANUARY 12 TO DISCUSS SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS AFTER THE CHINESE RELEASE OF THE SOVIET HELICOPTER CREW AND THE DEATH OF PREMIER CHOU. KRASHENINNIKOV SAID THAT THE SOVIETS WERE "DELIGHTED" AT THE CREW'S RELEASE, AND SAID THAT PEKING'S STATEMENT SHOWED THAT THE SOVIET STAND AT THE TIME OF THE INCIDENT AND SINCE HAD BEEN "CORRECT." CONCERNING THE CHINESE REITERATION THAT THE HELICOPTER HAD BEEN AN "ARMED RECONNAISSANCE" MODEL, HE SAID THAT IT WAS INDEED A REGULAR SOVIET MILITARY CRAFT AND THAT MOSCOW HAD NEVER DENIED THIS. IT WAS NOT, HOWEVER, SPECIALLY EQUIPPED FOR RECONNAISSANCE, NOR WAS IT ON SUCH A MISSION, HE SAID; IT HAD GONE ASTRAY ON A MEDICAL RESCUE MISSION, AS MOSCOW HAD ASSERTED. IT WAS NOT A SPECIAL MEDICAL HELICOPTER, BUT REGULAR CRAFT WERE OFTEN USED FOR SUCH PURPOSES IN EMERGENCIES. HE SAID, MUCH AS A TAXI OR TRUCK COULD BE USED TO DELIVER SOMEONE TO A HOSPITAL IF NECESSARY. IN AN ASIDE, KRASHENINNIKOV REFERRED TO HIS OWN SERVICE AT THE SOVIET CONSULATE IN URUMCHI BEFORE 1962 AND SAID THAT SUCH ACCIDENTAL INCURSIONS HAD OCCURRED "SEVERAL TIMES" BEFORE THAT, DUE TO EXTREMES OF WEATHER AND UNRECOGNIZABLE TERRAIN IN THE RUGGED AREA NEAR THE SINO-SOVIET-MONGOLIAN BORDER. BUT THESE CASES WERE ALWAYS RESOLVED QUICKLY AND WITHOUT PUBLICITY, HE SAID.

3. CONCERNING THE CREW'S TREATMENT IN CAPTIVITY,
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PAGE 03 MOSCOW 00463 131908Z

KRASHENINNIKOV SAID THAT THE THREE MEN HAD BEEN KEPT SEPARATED THROUGHOUT THEIR CONFINEMENT, FIRST NEAR URUMCHI FOR OVER A YEAR, THEN NEAR PEKING FROM MAY 1975 ON. THEY WERE IN GOOD HEALTH, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, AND WOULD BE RETURNING TO THEIR UNITS WHEN MEDICAL CHECK-UPS WERE COMPLETED. KRASHENINNIKOV OFFERED NO OTHER DETAILS ON THE CONDITIONS OF THE CREW'S CAPTIVITY, AND DID NOT MENTION

ANY MISTREATMENT, AS ALLEGED BY A SOVIET PUBLIC LECTURER ON JANUARY 9 (MOSCOW 399). KRASHENINNIKOV SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THE MANNER OF THE CHINESE RELEASE, WITH A SIGHTSEEING TOUR, SOUVENIR SHOPPING AND A FAREWELL BANQUET FOR THE CAPTIVES, WAS A UNIQUELY CHINESE TOUCH, A PECULIAR FORM OF HOSPITALITY.

4. ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A SOVIET GESTURE IN RESPONSE, KRASHENINNIKOV SAID THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT SPECIFICALLY MOSCOW COULD DO. HE SAID THAT THE SOVIET UNION STOOD FOR BETTER INTERSTATE RELATIONS EVEN IF IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES CONTINUED. BUT PEKING THWARTED MOSCOW'S EFFORTS. IF THE CHINESE SERIOUSLY WANTED TO IMPROVE RELATIONS, THEY COULD RESPOND TO SOVIET OFFERS. ON TRADE, FOR EXAMPLE, MOSCOW FEELS THAT BOTH SIDES WOULD BENEFIT BY HAVING A HIGHER LEVEL OF EXCHANGES, BUT THE CHINESE HAVE REFUSED. ANOTHER POSSIBLE STEP, SAID KRASHENINNIKOV, WOULD BE EXCHANGES OF CULTURAL OR SCIENTIFIC DELEGATIONS. THIS IS THE WAY STATES CONDUCT NORMAL RELATIONS, HE SAID. BUT IT IS UP TO THE CHINESE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY WANT BETTER RELATIONS, HE AFFIRMED; THE RELEASE IS ONE GESTURE, BUT ANTI-SOVIET COMMENTARIES CONTINUE AS HEAVILY AS EVER IN THE PRC PRESS.

5. HE ASSERTED THAT MOSCOW'S CHINA POLICY IS BOTH PRAGMATIC AND PRINCIPLED. IT IS "CORRECT," HE SAID; THEREFORE THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF A REASSESSMENT, MUCH LESS OF CHANGES. THE SOVIET PARTY CONGRESS IN FEBRUARY WOULD RESTATE MOSCOW'S "PRINCIPLED" POSITION, HE SAID, AND HE EXPECTED NO SURPRISES IN THE TREATMENT OF CHINA (NOR ON ANY OTHER ISSUE, HE SAID IN AN ASIDE).

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 MOSCOW 00463 131908Z

6. ON THE POSSIBILITY OF IL'ICHEV RETURNING TO PEKING, HE SAID THAT HE WAS NOT AWARE OF ANY PLANS TO SEND HIM BACK SOON, BUT THAT THE TALKS CONTINUE AS USUAL AT THE WORKING LEVEL. IF THERE IS SOME REASON FOR HIM TO GO, HE WILL GO, SAID KRASHENINNIKOV. THE TIMING OF THE PARTY CONGRESS WOULD NOT BE A PROBLEM, HE STRESSED, BECAUSE THE TALKS COULD BE RECESSED FOR A WEEK TO TEN DAYS IF NECESSARY.

7. TURNING TO THE DEATH OF CHOU EN-LAI, KRASHENINNIKOV SAID THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD HANDLE THE PROTOCOL FUNCTIONS THE SAME AS THEY HAD FOR THE DEATH OF TUNG PI-WU LAST APRIL. THE MESSAGE OF CONDOLENCE WAS VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL, AND THE CONDOLENCE BOOK AT THE PRC EMBASSY WOULD BE SIGNED "AT THE DEPUTY

PREMIER LEVEL." HE SAID THAT SOVIET PREMIER KOSYGIN WAS STILL ON LEAVE, AND HE WAS NOT SURE WHICH DEPUTY WOULD SIGN.

8. TENG HSIAO-PING WOULD ASSUME CHOU'S TITLE AS HE HAD ALREADY ASSUMED MOST FUNCTIONS, SAID KRASHENINNIKOV, BUT THE KEY QUESTION WAS THE PARTY HIERARCHY. LOGICALLY, WANG HUNG-WEN SHOULD MOVE UP TO THE SECOND SPOT, BUT KRASHENINNIKOV SAID THAT "WE, LIKE MANY AMERICAN OBSERVERS," ARE NOT CERTAIN THAT WANT IS ACTUALLY THAT IMPORTANT. IN ANY CASE, HE CONCLUDED, ONE CAN ONLY WAIT AND SEE. THE PICTURE IS NO CLEARER NOW THAN IT WAS BEFORE CHOU'S DEATH, AND ONE MUST BE VERY WARY ABOUT PREDICTING CHANGES IN CHINA. BUT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENT IN THE ONE AND ONE-HALF YEARS OF CHOU'S ILLNESS WAS HIS SUCCESS IN GETTING TENG IN PLACE TO MANAGE THE TRANSITION.
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